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The Bay of Pigs Invasion

Ike Takes Issue

with Kennedy Books

BY EARL MAZO

After the failure at the Bay of Pigs in 1961, former President Eisenhower's only comment was to call for bipartisan unity behind President Kennedy.

That was in keeping with Gen. Eisenhower's lifelong practice of supporting the nation's Commander-in-Chief in times of crises and shunning partisan excesses.

Over the years Gen. Eisenhower usually has ignored politically tinged distortions of his performance as President, military leader and elder statesman.

Now he would like to set the record straight on at least a couple of items in recent histories of the Kennedy administration by Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. and Theodore C. Sorensen, ranking members of Kennedy's staff.

The general views the Schlesinger and Sorensen attempts to link his administration with the Cuba invasion fiasco — discredit Eisenhower-appointed military and intelligence experts — as a perversion of history and a disservice to the late President Kennedy, who never sought to duck responsibility from the Sorensen version:

"On Jan. 20, 1961, John Kennedy inherited the plan, the planners, and most trouble

A Daily News Exclusive

Several biographies of President John F. Kennedy have been published recently by former members of his staff. These biographies refer to former President Dwight D. Eisenhower's role in events leading up to the Bay of Pigs episode.

Mr. Eisenhower, in a recent interview at Gettysburg, Pa., gave his version of the Cuban situation as it existed when he left the White House. Earl Mazo has written this report for Newsday and The Chicago Daily News.

ability for his executive decisions.

THE SPECIFICALLY disputed material by both writers is summed up in this paragraph of all, the Cuban exile brigade. . . . Unlike an inherited policy statement or executive order, this inheritance could not be simply disposed of by presidential rescission or withdrawal. . . ."

Gen. Eisenhower declares, "There was no tactical or operational plan even discussed" as of the day he turned the presidency over to John Kennedy.

During the transition period between the election in November, 1960, and the inauguration in January, President Eisenhower reviewed for his successor all pending matters, including a secret program inaugurated less than a year before to equip and train anti-Castro Cuban refugees.

The retiring President stressed that there had been no decisions as to how the

Cuban forces would be used, if at all. Gen. Eisenhower had made no commitments that might bind the new President in dealing with the Castro problem. In fact, the armed refugee group was still so small and relatively unprepared that it could easily have been disbanded if the incoming administration considered its existence unnecessary.

AS FOR THE non-political experts Mr. Kennedy chose to retain for his administration — notably Allen Dulles, director of the Central Intelligence Agency, and the military Joint Chiefs of Staff — Mr. Eisenhower says:

"These men over decades of devoted service have shown their capabilities, their sense of logic, their understanding of the problems involved in this kind of venture. There is no more expert group in their profession than these men. . . . I had the greatest confidence in them."

Kennedy Aides Called Unqualified

Nothing the former President was told by Mr. Kennedy and others after the Bay of Pigs debacle diminished his faith and confidence in Dulles and the military chiefs.

On the other hand, he believes the very disparagement of these seasoned professionals

shows how unqualified the former presidential assistants were to deal with the sort of problem involved in a critical international venture like the Bay of Pigs invasion.

LIKE MOST Americans, President Eisenhower welcomed the end of the Batista dictatorship in 1959 and hoped the new regime of Fidel Castro would live up to its promises of free elections and democracy in the exotic island republic just eight jet minutes from Florida.

Within a year, however, Castro created a dictatorship that was worse even than Batista's, and President Eisenhower had concluded that strong measures might be required to thwart Castro's apparent intention of establishing an outpost for Communist subversion in the Western Hemisphere.

Exactly what would have to be done — and when — remained to be decided. But the

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ARTHUR SCHLESINGER JR.



THEODORE SORENSEN

trusion in Latin America. Ex-dictator Jacobo Arbenz Guzman, whose efforts to make Guatemala a haven for the Soviets led to his downfall in 1954, would bear witness to that.

In mid-March, 1960, President Eisenhower decided that the United States would secretly aid anti-Castro Cubans. The CIA was directed to train and equip volunteers at bases in Guatemala, Panama and southern Florida.

The covert military instruction program was started partly in response to pleas by hundreds of refugees for something constructive to do. It was felt training would bolster the spirits of thousands who were fleeing the Castro dictatorship, and would give them hope that, in time, they would be able to "do the job" of ousting the communist regime.

IN ESSENCE, the long-range Eisenhower policy was to encourage and prepare Cubans to liberate their country.

President Eisenhower kept in close touch with developments through the summer and autumn, and personally reviewed numerous ideas and suggestions that normally would have been sifted out before reaching the White House. (For example, he rejected a proposal that the Cubans be trained in Samoa to insure tighter security than was possible in Central America.)

In recalling that period, the general notes the Bay of Pigs was never mentioned or considered in discussions of possible alternatives and contingencies. Most attention focused on prospects for an operation of some sort in or near the Escambray Mountains where a

government in exile might establish itself on Cuban soil.

The Vital Task Of Selecting Leader

Before there could be serious planning, however, the Cubans needed not only a well-supplied fighting force but also the leadership to organize a functioning government in exile.

THE LEADER or leaders had to be recognized and accepted by the Cuban people. That eliminated experienced individuals from the Batista regime and several leaders of political factions who bristled at the thought of co-operating or sharing the glory of overthrowing Castro.

The Cubans were still without their own leadership when President Eisenhower retired and President Kennedy was inaugurated.

The departing administration could not avoid bequeathing certain critical problems to its successor. One of the major unresolved problems Gen. Eisenhower reviewed at length for Kennedy at transition sessions was the Communist threat in Castro's Cuba.

"I told him exactly what we had been doing (in the Cuban refugee program)," recalls Mr. Eisenhower, and pinpointed the centers at which approximately 500 men were then being trained.

Gen. Eisenhower felt Kennedy shared his judgment that the new administration need not rush a decision regarding the Cubans.

"AT NO time did I put before anybody anything that could be called a plan (to invade Cuba)", declares the former President. He emphasizes that there was "no mandate, no commitment by me or anyone in my administration," and he doubts that Kennedy felt "he was frozen to any position by me."

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***Ike to Kennedy:
'You Must Decide'***

Among Gen. Eisenhower's last words to Kennedy before the ceremonial ride up Pennsylvania Avenue to the inauguration was:

"You people will have to decide what to do."

The two men did not speak with each other again for three months. Then, after the Bay of Pigs disaster, Kennedy hurriedly invited the general to Camp David and sent a White House helicopter to Gettysburg for him.

Kennedy said he sought the visit to "bring (Eisenhower) up to date on recent events and get the benefit of his thoughts and experience."

The President met the former President at the landing pad. It was April 22.

(The Bay of Pigs invasion had begun on April 17, and within a day or two Castro had wiped it out.)

Gen. Eisenhower recalls that Kennedy seemed "quite composed," but eager to talk out his young administration's humiliating experience.

IT WAS a long and wide-ranging conversation. Like many military figures who had no inside information as to what happened, the general wondered whether the invasion really had been launched, as reported, without air cover and other elementary ingredients familiar even to junior officers, like plans for reinforcing and resupplying the beachhead.

At one point Gen. Eisen-

hower asked his host if the Joint Chiefs of Staff had approved the battle plan.

Kennedy nodded and said, "with a few changes". Among other things, Kennedy explained the original plan had been trimmed to avoid letting the world see "America's hand" in the operation. Gen. Eisenhower suggested that the country's prestige and power should never be committed unless its chief executive was determined to win.

"There is no alternative", said the general. "Force is a naked, brutal thing in this world. If you are going to use it, you have got to be prepared to go all the way."

That afternoon Gen. Eisenhower stated at a news conference that all Americans should "support the man who has to carry the responsibility for our foreign affairs" — meaning President Kennedy. Subsequently, the Republican ex - President publicly reaffirmed his backing of the Democratic President at every opportunity, including Republican political gatherings, until the crisis atmosphere abated.

WHILE REFLECTING recently on the blunders that insured defeat at the Bay of Pigs—and thus entrenched, instead of overthrowing, the Castro dictatorship — Eisenhower was reminded that Guatemala probably still would be a Communist stronghold if political advice had prevailed during a crucial stage of the anti-Arbenz venture, in 1954, as happened during the anti-Castro venture in 1961.

***Victory Achieved
Through Politics***

The invasion of Guatemala, which was led and conducted by Guatemalan volunteers but covertly sponsored and supplied by the United States, floundered just as it was on the brink of success. The crisis stemmed from sudden lack of air support. Two of the liberating force's three aircraft had been destroyed, and without replacements the invasion would be doomed.

In Washington, President Eisenhower summoned military, intelligence and diplomatic experts. A State Department spokesman argued for a political, not a military decision. He contended that by sending replacement aircraft to Guatemala, America would risk having its role in the anti-Arbenz venture discovered, and that, in turn, would damage our prestige throughout Latin America.

ALLEN DULLES, the intelligence director whose agency was masterminding the invasion, argued that the airplanes were essential to success—and therefore should be sent.

President Eisenhower agreed with Dulles. And a couple of days later the Communist regime in Guatemala was overthrown.

Gen. Eisenhower's reasoning in that crisis was consistent with the advice he offered President Kennedy nine years later.

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